

THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF
ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS
(Section of the Library Association)


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(Kingston-upon-Thames Public Library)

No. 441

JULY, 1936

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The Library Assistant ANNOUNCEMENTS

OWING to the early date of the September Council meeting, members are reminded that nominations for Officers and Council, 1937, must reach the Honorary Secretary not later than the 8th September, 1936.

Students are reminded that revision courses for the Intermediate Examination of the Library Association are arranged to commence in September, and to finish in time for the following examinations.

These revision courses are intended only for students who have previously sat for the Intermediate Examination of the Library Association. In no circumstance will any other application be accepted.

The Correspondence Courses comprise five double lessons, consisting of a prescribed selection of technical reading, hints and advice on study and practical work, and questions or subjects for essays upon which the Tutor will write comments or corrections. Total inclusive fee, £2 13s. Either section may, however, be taken separately for a fee of £1 6s. 6d.

Exercise note-books and postage wrappers are provided.

Any person not a member of the Association may take these courses, but at double the above-mentioned fees.

Application forms may be obtained from Mr. S. W. Martin, Carnegie Library, Herne Hill Road, London, S.E.24. Students wishing to enter for a course must complete the form and send it, together with the necessary fee, to reach Mr. Martin, by 20th August. After this date no application will be considered, nor will the Council guarantee any student a course who does not give all the particulars asked for. No student will receive any part of a course until at least one week after the closing date for applications.

IMPORTANT.—Students entering for these courses should understand that it will be necessary for them to study at high pressure and to keep to a very strict time-table.

MARGATE, 1936

FRANK M. GARDNER

IT would be absurd, in view of the enormous and admirable report issued by the *Library Association Record*, to comment on the whole of the Conference, or even with any fullness on the Sectional Meetings of special interest to assistants. A few highlights are all one can give, or rather a few remembered impressions aided by almost undecipherable notes.

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A breakdown at Canterbury made me approach Margate in a very jaundiced frame of mind and a car which seemed likely to explode at any moment. An A.A. loop-the-loop way which wandered through a wilderness of villadom increased the jaundice, and a realization that dressing for a reception is not as easy as it was before one acquired a wife, made me look on the coming week with a rather yellow eye. But the reception itself cleared all that away. A Wintergarden that really was a garden and not a collection of dusty palms and evergreens made a charming background for the Mayor of Margate and the President as they received their guests. Never, I should say, has a conference been held in more lovely surroundings, and when the papers and discussions palled one could always contemplate the incredible flowers and try to remember their Latin names.

After a night of greeting old friends, dancing, and re-greeting old friends after the ball was over, we gathered on Tuesday morning to hear the Mayor of Margate welcome us in an admirable speech marred by one *gaffe* that one hopes he did not intend to make. Then the Presidential address. I personally hoped for something fairly Savage, but only occasionally did it reach the heights where young assistants bite their tongues in inferior rage. Everybody will by now have read the address and admired it as a classic piece of prose and a clever argument. One disagrees with some of the argument, of course. In discussing book-selection, for instance, the President states that the problem of book-selection, so urgent to-day, cannot be solved by co-operative action, although he deplors the lucky-dip method which alas! is inevitable in certain classes. As a remedy, he proposes subject-librarianship—not pure specialist control, but a method by which specialist plus librarian achieve a perfect equilibrium. This is, of course, only applicable in large libraries, and to aid the smaller libraries the President looks forward to a time when larger administrative areas will be formed. But is not that assigning to a very vague future the solution of a most pressing problem? The librarian might not be saved any time, but it is not time one wishes to save, but useless expenditure. I am quite willing to spend time on discovering what books in a selection are likely to be required by my readers, so long as I know that all the books are of value to someone. But one is grateful to the President for even talking about book-selection. Very few of the speakers at the Conference did.

The next general session was of special interest to assistants, since it was on the subject of library staffs. Mr. Fry of Manchester devoted himself to the staffing of large libraries, from the Chief Librarian downwards. He emphasised

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the lures and dangers of specialization, the difficulties of selecting suitable entrants to the service, and the evils of supplementary staffs. He mentioned one library that employed sixty male juniors at the age of 14 and dismissed them at 16. I only wish he had named the library. His conclusion was that better training is likely to be obtained in a medium-sized library than a large one. Few will dispute that, although the large library in which I was trained had a system of exchange that gave adequate training to all who showed the slightest desire for it. Mr. Pollitt's paper suffered a little by coming in the second half of an already lengthy session. But assistants would do well to study his unanswerable reply to the grumblers who complain of the continual raising of the standard of the Library Association examinations. They would do better to pursue his argument that library training should be inverted, and begin in those inner temples where technical mysteries are performed, and not end there. Perhaps there might be found some solution of the problem of passing examinations.

Whether by chance or design, we had not finished with library staffs that day, and snatching a cup of tea and a bun, the more enthusiastic (or conscientious) of us went to hear Mr. Gillett on staff training. In passing, one might note that from the way they pop up in discussion, chairmen of committees are the most conscientious delegates of all. They were very noticeable at Mr. Gillett's meeting, though it cannot be said that they added a great deal to the discussion—the major idea of chairmen being usually to expatiate on what we do at so and so. (See the O.E.D. for alternative meanings of expatiate.) Mr. Gillett's emphasis on background as well as technical training was a valuable reminder, and his insistence that a chief librarian should keep in touch with his staffs to see that their progress was maintained was a useful reminder to chiefs. Perhaps the most useful thing arising out of the paper was Mr. Bolton's suggestion in discussion that some training should be given to senior assistants in committee work, and from the way in which a dissenting speaker in discussion was squashed it appeared that most present agreed with the idea.

That same evening Mr. Hilaire Belloc gave us a talk which would have probably sounded very well after a large dinner and a pint of Bollinger. It seemed hardly necessary, however, to get a large and presumably intelligent audience together to hear four not very funny stories and few remarks on the processes of book-production. I wished Mr. Belloc had said a little less, and Miss Kingsmill Jones, who proposed the vote of thanks, a little more.

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On Wednesday the chief interest for assistants was the sectional meeting at 5.15. Owing to lack of time, Mr. Burton's paper was not given, but the other four were models of how much practical thought can be compressed into ten minutes. Mr. White's struck me as the best, perhaps because it was the best delivered, and it may be noted in passing that he was the only conference speaker to receive the honour of a leader in the *Manchester Guardian*. Again we had a good deal of discussion from chairmen, and I was surprised and sorry to see that not one assistant, and there were a good many there, had anything to say. Perhaps they were frightened off by the gentleman who gave the speakers a lecture on the necessity of learning elocution. Apart from the bad taste of his remarks, which were delivered as though he were addressing a pack of schoolboys, I could not help wondering why he had not registered his protests earlier to Messrs. Savage and Belloc, both of whom were more inaudible than the speakers at this session. Inaudibility is a curse of the Conference, but if speakers have no previous opportunity of testing the acoustics of the hall and no experience of the microphone, what can one expect? If really experienced speakers fail, as they did, why blame the assistant in public?

Thursday, of course, was the highlight of the whole week, but since the nationalization meeting was a private one, public writing is not yet permitted. Anyway, everyone will be nauseated with the word nationalization in the next two years—Librarianship has a new bone to chew. For assistants, the Conference ended with some glory in the last sectional session, when three children's librarians spoke good sense in most audible language. I am a firm believer in the superiority of the male, but am quite prepared to believe in the superior audibility of the female voice. And I am quite sure that Miss Exley was the most efficient chairman of the Conference.

And that was Margate. Not perhaps an outstanding Conference. The practice of choosing subjects and then casting around for speakers is not, I think, the best way of getting the best out of a man, except where the whole of the meetings gather round one theme. But we left still clinging firmly to our crosses and with a few practical ideas in our trunks to decorate them with.

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STANLEY HOLLIDAY

A WARNING maroon should be fired off! For the reports of the Regional Library Bureaux for the past year are making their appearance, which is a signal for the annual repetition of violently opinionated arguments and a maelstrom of general ill-feeling into which the names of several honoured services are inevitably dragged. However, we shall do well to avoid the thorny questions of finance and comparative burden of inter-loan, and comment on less dangerous but no less significant features.

The four reports to hand are almost identical in appearance, and are legible, but not otherwise distinguished in make-up. The Northern System's report is the best written, the North-Western's the most informative. Both of these, and the West Midlands Bureau, report a rising appreciation of their services, but all three are overshadowed by the work of the South-Eastern System, which has, of course, a largish number of constituent libraries. More than 14,000 applications were received by the last system during the year, of which about 90 per cent. were satisfied. This demand is so great (and it is merely a trickle to the coming flood) that it seems unlikely for the system to become approximately self-supporting for years.

The official stiffness of the reports must be criticized, for more notice should be given to books and subjects in demand, and to types of enquiry made, if only to show interdependence. The North-Western Regional deserves less reproach than the others in this respect, and its lengthier account is a "library document" that students cannot afford to miss.

The spirit of the reports is encouraging. One notes a liberalism and a fine flavour of enthusiasm which augur well for the growing power of the library movement. And even the most sceptical must be convinced that the combined though thankless and unspectacular efforts of the bureaux editors will, within a dozen years, provide the libraries of Great Britain with a bibliographical tool of a power as yet unrealized in the great union catalogue of the National Central Library.

Of a small batch of annual reports from individual libraries, *Dover's* is outstanding. There is no doubt that hard work is being done in that corner of Kent, and readers of *The Times* will have noticed the librarian's flair for obtaining worth-while publicity. The issues summarized in the report follow the orthodox trend for the first years of a library's existence, with an extremely

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high percentage of fiction, which will tend to decrease proportionately with a rise in the use of non-fiction. It is unnecessary to pick points from the *Dover* report. The whole is evidence of progress and forethought, and if every avenue of book-service has not yet been discovered or explored, then whatever remains will not long withstand a fertile and inquisitive mind.

Walthamstow's annual report has been covered more or less by the separate article that appeared recently in the L.A.R. It is a record of modernization and reconstruction, admirably organized. We notice one point that calls for comment. *Walthamstow* puts the resources of the South-Eastern Regional System at three million books. Elsewhere we have seen it described as six, and someone has compromised with four millions. These figures are all wildly out, for the effective—compared with the numerical—resources of the Bureau are probably much less than a million, but like the young gentleman in "Acorned hog," we are collecting variants for fun.

Stretford tactfully excuses a decrease, while *Yeovil* (a much smaller service) rejoices in an increased issue. But—good heavens!—are figures so important? After circulating more than six hundred thousand volumes under serious limitations of space, *Stretford* has every reason to gloat. We are intrigued by the librarian's remark that insufficient time is found for making known facilities to those "to whom they could have a more definite educational and cultural use." Surely in all propaganda—and more so in positive than subversive—it is the time factor rather than the intensity that counts. And if *Stretford* can contribute but the least influence to the local conscience, this will doubtless have a cumulative effect if prolonged and consistent.

Blyth's annual report, which was noticed recently, is not an isolated example of Northumbrian enthusiasm. Mr. Reynolds has now produced three pamphlets of first-rate quality, of which we select "Now you are rather older" as a tiny triumph. It is merely an introduction (with some suitable recommendations for reading) for erstwhile junior borrowers to an intermediate section of the main lending library. It was "designed to catch the missing generation": if it fail to catch, then that generation will have been well missed. There are three ways of addressing adolescents: (a) as did Raymond Martin, M.P., of fearful memory; (b) as only children's librarians can; (c) in a way that comes by the grace of God, and raises not the least inhibition in a sensitive frame. Mr. Reynolds has acquired the last-named manner. Again, we note that fundamental honesty is the basis of the text, and the librarian has been sufficiently heretical (in some quarters) to ask intelligence of his readers! But—we cannot resist

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it—what is that cover ornament? Is it shorthand, or, as we strongly suspect, a symbolic interpretation of sea-sickness?

The *Nottingham "Bulletin"* for Spring has a welcome feature. It gives a little boost to reference service. Perhaps it is the fault of librarians that the populace has come to associate "public library" with unseemly bustle, a good deal of elbowing, and a sales-like atmosphere. And while crowds of persons and crowds of figures are taken as the only criteria of success, there is no doubt that the reference service of average towns will continue to suffer. Furthermore, there is an idea abroad—and progressive men subscribe to it—that a reference library must build up a definite clientele to justify its existence. The truth is (there are certain magnificent exceptions) that we are not as a whole reference conscious. Wyer's text-book could never have been written outside the United States, and it is amazing that with all our admitted willingness we seem unable to develop a capacity for really first-rate bibliographical and factual research. Where, in Britain, is a staff so constituted as that of Montclair, New Jersey, where intellectual capacity has been bent deliberately to the service of the reference library? Even if we are never able to get as far as Wyer's "liberal theory of reference work," we are justified in attempting immediate and all-round improvement in approach to and in conception of this type of work.

Two attractive but widely differing productions are "Holidays at home" from *Oxford*, and "Social problems," a catalogue from *Middlesex County Library*. The latter, ninety-five pages for sixpence, is a useful little manual. We noticed occasional inequalities and an omission here and there, while there is no index, but the catalogue should meet a demand from the hugely increased population of that county. The title "Holidays at home" reveals the scope of the other reading-list. It is a very ambitious publication to have issued in quantity, but is good and seasonable publicity. A few apt quotations relative to towns and counties add spice, and we note with pleasure that the booklet is sewed, not stapled. It is an open question whether novels should be added to these lists of holiday books. *Oxford* forbears, but maybe some genius will produce someday a work of outstanding interest with unlikely material such as "Gaudy night" and "Magnus Merriman," the lower Thames of W. W. Jacobs, Walter Greenwood's Lancashire, and the Shropshire, not of Webb, but Wodehouse.

How often, in the Literary History paper, does a succulent question occur on writings in the Dominions and Colonies? And who would know enough to answer with discrimination? *Croydon*, as noted in the current "Readers' index," has been filling gaps with a collection of Australian literature, an

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example that might profitably be followed elsewhere. To encourage buying as well as reading, *Hornsey* has produced a somewhat rough-and-ready "Best books for boys and girls, 1935," similar in intent and content to the *Derby County* list of several months ago. *Liverpool Public Libraries* have given a brief but useful account of themselves in issues of a local magazine of pronounced municipal political views, but none can deny a librarian the right to cast his net in every direction.

When compared with the productions of North America, our own professional journals and library publications appear amateurish to some extent—which is not necessarily a term of condemnation. Nothing from the home front, for instance, can be compared with the scholarly paper of Professor Samuel Morison on "Old school and college books," in the *Boston* bulletin for March. It may be that the British librarian likes a more familiar strain in his periodicals, but it cannot be said that he is less practical than his Western colleagues. Certainly he is less disposed to rhapsodize over the application of machinery to library methods—which does not indicate that his technique belongs to the past. For example, a photostat is an almost wholly unnecessary literary tool in this small country of cheap and rapid transport. But nevertheless, as the native librarian grows older, he seems apt to dissipate his remaining energy in feats of memory relating to the library world of former days.

To reminisce is for the most part a harmless occupation, but occasionally a note of querulousness creeps in. Mr. Jast, for example, in the Spring number of the *Library review*, offends when in a very word he manages to convey the impression that "many, many" (*sic*) library assistants are ill-read boors, having gained qualifications through a good deal of low cunning. There are several excellent replies to the charges of apathy and ignorance brought not infrequently against assistants, but the latter, with good-humoured tolerance, are averse to the ancient pastime of public linen-washing. R. W. Bowdler's paper on "Some staff problems from the assistant's point of view" in *Open Access*, the organ of the Midland Division of the A.A.L., is a good example of the sweet reasonableness of the younger man's attitude. No doubt there are slackers as well as fanatics among the junior ranks of the profession, but there is a solid majority of interested and interesting persons whose serious fault is their woeful capacity for inarticulateness. Yet sweeping criticism from within or without the profession cannot always be met with stubborn silence, for even the humblest junior, if he perform his job conscientiously, may claim rank somewhere in the hierarchy of scholarship.

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FACTORS IN THE HISTORY OF THE LIBRARY MOVEMENT¹

R. W. LYNN

THERE are so many factors in the history of libraries that a very cursory examination makes it evident that I cannot deal with them all in a single paper. Fortunately, it is unnecessary that they should be brought together in their entirety in an address of this kind. The history of the libraries of the Ancients, the Acts governing library provision in this country, the influence of benefactors like Passmore Edwards, Andrew Carnegie, and later his Trustees, landmarks in development like the introduction of open-access, removal of rate restriction, and establishment of Regional Bureaux, have already become so well known to this audience (in many cases through a painful examination process) that I am certain I would not be expected to repeat here these and other accepted factors.

In defining the scope of my paper I would say that what I wish to do is to examine the field of social history and the history of literature in order to find primarily whether there is any relationship between the two, and if so, to proceed to ask whether movements in social history and literary history have influenced the development of libraries, to see whether there is any reflex of important, historical, social, and literary movements in the history of public libraries—in short, to see whether libraries have been in touch with life. Before proceeding farther—and in case you may ask the reason for this introspection—let me add that I have selected the subject, not merely for the satisfaction which descends on one through philosophizing on the past, but because I believe that through the study of the past the road for the future may be discovered, and further, that if we are agreed that the present decade marks an important chapter in our national development, it is more than ever necessary that we should have a proper perspective of the place the public library is to occupy in the social life of the future.

It will be unnecessary for me to take up time unduly to establish the relationship between literature and social life, for, although opinions may differ on the closeness of this relationship, the fact of its existence will, I think, be agreed.

¹ A paper read at a meeting of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Division, at Merthyr Tydfil, on 11th March, 1936.

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I would, however, like to reiterate some of the salient characteristics in order to introduce the argument. The value of written records in the historical researches of the archaeologists calls for no further comment, but we might remind ourselves that no matter how great a harvest of material evidence of other kinds excavations may provide, the history of early peoples could not have been deduced with certainty and authority had the literary records, whether they were moulded in clay, cut in stone, or written on papyrus or parchment, remained undiscovered or been despoiled by the ravages of time.

A comparison of epochs of national literary history and national social history will leave little room for doubt that literary effusion is greatest during periods of greatest national development, and, on the other hand, great literature has never been created in periods of national decay and degeneration.

Sometimes the influence of contemporary events is direct, as, for example, in the war books of yesterday, in the humanitarian poetry of the earlier Victorian era (Thomas Hood's, for instance), in the descriptive poetry of Burns, and in the majority of the fiction of the last century, with Dickens as an outstanding illustration. In earlier literature the *Canterbury tales*, some of the boisterous plays of Shakespeare's contemporaries, and possibly much of the Restoration drama, may be regarded as descriptive of the customs and manners of the time.

But, where the evidence is not so obvious, my point is that the relationship exists equally strongly, even if we have to interpret it in general terms, and say, "The spirit of a great age so stirred the minds of the writers of the time that the work they created must be regarded as an expression of the emotion thus awakened." Otherwise, it is difficult to account for the return to the simple joys and beauties of Nature in the work of a group of contemporaries like Byron, Shelley, and Keats at the very commencement of the Industrial Age. It would be difficult to account for the group of gay Caroline poets, with their light, inconsequent, yet delightful lyrics to their ladies at a time when the search for pleasure was the whole object of social and court life. And again, it would be impossible to account for the greatest age of our national history coinciding with our greatest period of literary effusion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—an age which, even with the all-overshadowing Shakespeare taken out, would still leave Elizabethan literature (with Sir Philip Sidney, Francis Bacon, Marlow, and Ben Jonson) as our greatest creative treasure, if not the greatest literary epoch in European history. Elizabethan literature was the psychological legacy of the Renaissance and the Reformation. It was an age of expansion at home, expansion abroad, and therefore of expansion in the realm of the mind.

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It should be noted, however, that in the ground just covered, libraries have no effective place as agencies for moulding public literary opinion or for furthering the creation and dissemination of literature. Library history takes us back to the earliest times, and libraries are as old as literature itself, but there is a distinction to be made between nearly all libraries in all countries up to about eighty or ninety years ago and the modern public library. Those early libraries were primarily safe places where books could be stored and preserved. They therefore played no part in educating the general body of a more or less illiterate public and added little to the general culture of the times.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the coincidence of the simultaneous clamour for the spreading of popular knowledge and the readjustment of the population to the changed conditions caused by the Industrial Revolution, is equally interesting to the student of literature, the student of social history, and the librarian.

To the librarian a picture of the social conditions from which his movement eventually emerged is both enlightening and surprising. Between 1790 and 1840 a steady influx of rural labour to the industrial centres had completely inverted the proportion of country and town dwellers of 2 to 1 and made conditions in the towns appalling. These new town dwellers were described in the Health of Towns Commission's Second Report of 1845 as having "a low and grovelling mode of life." The influx caused further crowding in the already overcrowded quarters of the poor. On the industrial side it might be noted that little time was left for recreation or education after factory hours. The Ten Hours Bill was not passed until 1847 to alter conditions under which even children of between 9 and 18 worked twelve hours a day, exclusive of meal-times, for six days a week, and to give workmen some small opportunity to share in culture and leisure.

The Hammonds, in *The Age of the Chartists*, describe the schools graphically. They say, "For about 4d. per week parents could send their children to the Dame School, where books to read and fresh air to breathe were equally scarce, where discipline depended on the rod, and where the only saving grace was a certain slackness so that in hot weather children could stretch out their limbs on the floor (if there were room) and sleep away a weary afternoon."

It would seem that ordinary boys and girls with their short school life had little chance of carrying away the ability to read any kind of literature with enjoyment, and yet a passion for reading was a marked feature of the late '30's and the '40's, and a flood of cheap periodical literature was produced

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specially adapted to the tastes of the working classes. A witness before the Select Committee on Arts and Principles of Design in 1836 described how, with their steam printing press, his firm produced every Saturday 360,000 copies of the *Penny magazine*, *Saturday magazine*, and *Chambers's Journal*.

The demand for education led to the establishment of Mechanics' Institutes, where the intelligent workman could borrow books to educate himself, and here is the first break in the tradition of library history through the ages. A new Institution came into being in the form of a library where books, instead of being merely stored and preserved, could be used, worn out, and replaced. The Mechanics' Institute was the forerunner of the modern public library, and its establishment heralded the commencement of an era where libraries, as distributors of literature, joined with literature itself in playing an important part in social life.

These Institutes came into being despite considerable opposition. There still prevailed in many quarters a strong jealousy of any political discussion by the people and still more of any society which proposed to assemble periodically several hundreds of the labouring classes. Indeed, a leading newspaper could say in 1825 of the proposed London Mechanics' Institution: "A scheme more completely adapted for the destruction of this Empire could not have been invented by the devil himself than that which the depraved ambition of some men, the vanity of others, and the supineness of a third and more important class had so nearly perfected."

Without wishing to emphasize the importance of libraries to the community as visualized in the minds of these pioneers of eighty or more years ago, the inference may be fairly drawn that, in adapting themselves to the changed conditions after the Industrial Revolution, the need for better education was immediately recognized, and the public library was the only institution for the dissemination of knowledge among an adult population which was not to hear of free education for children until nearly thirty years later.

Library statistics from the whole of the country since the war show another immense revival in the public demand for literature, and incidentally a recognition by the public generally of the place of the public library in the national life. As an illustration of this it might be mentioned that in 1850 the Public Libraries Bill was carried by a majority of seventeen—in 1919 the Public Libraries Act was passed without a division, and certainly, from the increased use and appreciation of library facilities by the public, it would seem that this change of opinion by the Government symbolized the trend of public opinion.

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If one searches for a reason for this increase in activity during the last decade, an analogy will be found in the agitation for libraries and literature one hundred years ago. If libraries could play some part in adapting the town labourer to changed social conditions, then they should, with their increased resources, be capable of playing at least an equal part amidst the changed conditions since the war.

It is not for me to deal here with the change in the social structure except to point to factors this change has brought about in relation to books and their use. I would number them thus:

1. The higher standard of education demanded in all walks of life.
2. The increase of specialized work and research, particularly in Industry, Commerce, and Science.
3. The greater demand for recreational reading, either as a diversion from more specialized routine in the factory and workshop, or from the great number of people who are out of employment.

The first of these is too obvious to need any exposition from me. In our schools and colleges it is universally recognized that education does not consist merely of a curriculum, no matter how comprehensive, but must cover the whole field of knowledge, and be interpreted by that wider term "Culture" which may only be gained by a love of books and reading.

The other two causes have, however, had also a definite effect on literature. Specialization has crept into almost every phase of life and labour, and so, in science, the general survey of any science—if it has not been superseded—has been supplemented by monographs on detailed observations of the most minute shoots of its branches.

Lastly, the increase in general reading for recreation, coupled with the extension of scientific knowledge, has resulted in innovations in style and treatment.

The advance of modern science, greater public interest in social problems, the study of psychology, and the war are together responsible for a complete change in the form and technique of the modern novel.

The Victorian novel, as typified by Dickens, Thackeray, and down to Hardy, was a novel of action or description, based on a carefully constructed plot, with the interest distributed over a large number of carefully drawn characters. Realism was always modified by a sense of decorum, and fine regard was paid to the niceties of literary style.

The modern novel dispenses with plot as far as possible; instead of action

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it probes the psychology upon which the actions may be founded, and its text, instead of being employed to describe characters, is the medium for expounding the personal ideas of the author, whether social, moral, or philosophic. Often we get realism unabashed in quite individual styles.

From the same causes a similar change has come over the English Drama. Under the leadership of Bernard Shaw, the play has become philosophic instead of narrative. It uses its characters as a means of propagating the opinions of the author and in the process has naturally increased its scope. Drama is no longer limited to plot patterns, of a small number of emotional problems, like the "triangle" in love and the woman with a "past." In its closer relation to life as most people know it, the drama has made considerable advance since the days of its stilted, elaborate, and unreal dialogue on stock situations relating to high society life, as typified in the drama of the '90's.

Why do I mention these changes in imaginative literature, when we are primarily concerned with distribution rather than creation of literature? My object here is to point out that libraries have a duty to contemporary literature just as our Art Galleries have to modern art. If we realize that modern literature reflects our national character, that to the historian of the future it will be the means by which our national development can be measured, it ought to give us added incentive to see that our stocks become as representative of modern thought as possible, and that in our election we should not be unduly hampered by a censorship whether nationally established or dictated by public opinion. The most telling challenge I have heard was that of Mr. Harrison of Liverpool, in a recent paper on Censorship, and I can think of no stronger argument for my own point. He asked, if our libraries were closed for fifty years and then re-opened, could it be said, "There is the representative literature of the nineteen-thirties"?

There is another side with which libraries are also intimately concerned. In the matter of actual book production we must recognize the strong tendency among publishers to cater primarily for the third group I mentioned earlier, *i.e.* those who read for recreation only. This is obviously a matter of simple business economics. The increased public demand for this type of literature, fed by the additional facilities for borrowing fiction and ephemeral and largely imaginative non-fiction, ensure a certain market for work which need not attain the more exacting standard of an earlier age.

It is becoming more and more evident to us that, despite the increasing number of books published each year, the number of important and standard

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works is decreasing—indeed, so far as technical and scientific works are concerned, it now appears that the national market alone cannot guarantee the necessary support, but that it requires the joint encouragement of English and American markets before publishers feel justified in producing books of this class.

In terms of actual figures, the number of books published in 1935 was 30 per cent. higher than in 1913, but the fiction increase was over 97 per cent. Other increases are shown in Sociology, Sports and Games, and Biography, but in Technology, Science, Commerce, and Literature, not only are their proportionate places not maintained, but the actual number of books published was less in 1935 than in 1913.

I do not for one moment wish to shirk the duties of public libraries for providing literature for recreational purposes. On the contrary, my view is that we must meet the demand of those who provide our maintenance, and there is no doubt that the preponderance of our readers are not serious students. We also know that, with the ordinary limited resources of book funds, it is impossible to keep pace with the insatiable demands of those readers who require only light fiction, imaginative travel, or scandalous biography. Only one policy is left for us to pursue—that is, to continue to press for increased allowances for the purchase of books, but whether adequate book funds come early or late, we must meanwhile preserve the balance between that which is ephemeral and that which is important in our selections. This is perfectly elementary and seemingly unnecessary dogmatism, yet I believe I am justified in mentioning it here.

There has recently appeared a long controversy in our professional press on the question of standard stock versus issue value. The protagonists were Messrs. Jast and Savage. Each knows that the arguments of the other are perfectly sound, both know that they are taking up extreme positions, and both should know, yet fail to acknowledge, that for municipal public libraries at any rate the perfect course for selection to follow must run between their respective extremes.

The point I wish to make is that we should endeavour to find that middle way exactly, for in finding it libraries can play a part in the order of things which they have never assumed before. There is an opportunity here for libraries to influence the *creation* rather than the distribution of books. The combination of the support of all the public libraries in purchasing standard books of all kinds, added to the usual channels through which such books are sold—uni-

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versities, special libraries, students, and specialists—would make the publication of standard books a much less speculative proposition than it is at present.

I have mentioned the effect of modern inventions and social changes on imaginative literature. These factors have caused another change which affects us. The twentieth century has seen the partial elimination of the literary society, the reading circle, the Dickens Club, and kindred social, educational societies. This decline has been due to the opening of ways of less resistance in the spending of leisure time, which, apart from bridge, dancing, and motoring, include the wireless and the cinema.

To-day we seek our topical information in picture form in our newspapers, we expect our knowledge and much of our amusement to call for no more effort than the pressing of the switch on the wireless set, and after a couple of hours at the cinema we wonder whether we have had pleasure or improvement, and try to delude ourselves that we have had both. These modern inventions come to us as our friends, advertise themselves as useful corollaries to our educational systems, and on account of this are particularly invidious, because the net result to the individual is the production of mental inertia, unless he is able to judge their scope and adopt for himself some active—instead of only passive—mental training.

The trouble seems to be that we are searching for a phantom—that mirage of the realm of the mind—a royal road to learning. Aristotle's axiom, that no such road exists, will not be disproved by the modern inventions of the film, the wireless, and the picture paper.

The present state of affairs offers libraries another avenue for exerting their influence on social life. The library should be the centres from which radiate the means whereby the remnants of those who enjoyed the cultural associations of pre-war days may again find a Mecca amidst a pleasure-seeking world. I believe that from this nucleus the library would achieve, not an incidental, but a dominant place in society, for it should in the future bring within its own scope all that educational activity which was formerly dispersed over a multitude of extraneous organization.

Let us remember the clamour for knowledge in the eighteen-thirties. Let us admit the demand for reading primarily for pleasure in the pleasure-loving nineteen-thirties, but let us look forward to the nineteen-forties, when we shall have the beginnings of a reading public whose taste will be based on an educational tradition of seventy years or more, a generation which is entirely untouched by the reactions of war, but mellowed and matured early

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through the keenness of the competition it will have found early in life, and above all, a reading public which will be intent on deriving the greatest benefit from increased leisure.

Nothing I have said is new to you. All I have attempted has been to collect some known facts and established axioms. Perhaps I have arranged them in a new order, so that we may judge the prospective widening of the scope of our work. What I wish particularly to emphasize is that only by fresh activity can libraries hold the esteem of an educated public. Their influence was nearly non-existent while they were merely *collectors* of literature and store-houses for books. They began to take up their responsibilities as soon as they became active agencies in the *distribution* of literature. The position they will occupy in the future will be relative to the amount of influence they can exert in the *creation* of literature and of literary taste. The means to this end are: (1) by discriminate selection of that which is representative of the age in the arts (remembering that to the future student of the humanities all literature is objectively historical), (2) by combined efforts to encourage the publication of all that is important in the sciences, and (3) by making the public library the centre from which general non-curricula education may be organized.

Literature and education have achieved their proper places in history and communal life. Let us see that libraries, with their intimate association with all of these factors, are not relegated to a lesser place.



AN ASSISTANT'S DIARY

"SCRIPTOR"

14th April.—Very busy this day, after the Easter holiday, issue being twice the average almost, which was a change indeed. So thought how good a thing if every day was like it, and how it would delight the Chief's heart. But then, we should surely soon be crying out for more staff. Which brings to mind the great disadvantage of this business, viz. the inability to satisfy readers' queries in anything like a proper manner, being all too busy serving and shelving. So wondered yet again how valueless to our true work is a large issue, and how we may have done a much more real work in a day of but 200 issues than in one of 600 or more. And here remembered my own shortcomings in these my own ideals, having so often passed off borrower's sincere request as quickly as

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possible for inward annoyance's sake. Thinking still on this topic as I journeyed home, began to see what we ought all to be doing more, and encouraged to do, even the youngest juniors, instead of being discouraged as some of us are. Surely we who do most of the counter work should know more of the *inside* of our stocks, and not merely the titles thereof? Our own leisure is barely sufficient for a cursory knowledge of this kind, though some may find time to go assiduously through current reviews. Thought how many times my recommendations have been of little use when at last having to answer the oft-recurring query, "Have you read this yourself?" And all this is just another reason, and methinks an important one, for no library to be understaffed in the slightest. When there's no routine work to go round, there's the opportunity to do a little browsing (with Chief's consent, of course!), and equip ourselves more for our job.

23rd April.—Weather still keeps cold, but issue still dropping, hearing comments thereon every day almost from Chief, as though we might do something about it ourselves, perhaps. Would like to hear from any library where issue has gone up, and what reason it can be accounted to. Believe, however, that the drop is fairly common to the whole country. One reason I have not seen yet. Which is the fact that more money is about now than five or six years ago, when the depression was deepest and our issues were higher. Consequently, people are spending more leisure time on what to them is more attractive amusement elsewhere. Not that we cater for amusement, though we may do unconsciously sometimes! But readers will know what I mean. If any doubt this to be a sufficient reason, let them notice the long queues for the picture-places on so many nights, especially at the cheaper houses, and remember whether this was quite so much the case five years ago. I think not.

29th April.—Looking in this month's *Record*, mighty pleased to find, in the article on Contemporaries, these pages recommended to "all Chiefs who have forgotten their youth." And may I humbly add, those who remember it too much! How many of us have not heard, "My goodness (or some stronger ejaculation), when I was your age . . ."? We must still look forward, and not backward. The time is not yet when we can turn round and view the bad patches and pat ourselves on the back. We still have a few puddles in front to watch. And some of them may get pretty deep if we do not watch carefully. How serious I grow these last few days! I am sorry, Mr. Editor. I agreed, I think, to *lighten* these pages, not load them.

11th May.—Received this morning, with much pleasure and gratitude, the

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current copy of *Open access*, the cyclostyled quarterly of the Midland Division. This in answer to my plaint last month that the substance of Mr. Bowdler's paper at Kidderminster was not given in the *Record's* report of the meeting. So here I have the full text, together with other writings of Midlanders. And mighty interesting it proved to be. Mr. Bowdler mentions in his paper what I have mentioned above, about answering readers' queries during busy periods. He advocates the employment of a senior whose first duty is to attend to borrowers, especially new ones. His desk should be in a prominent place, preferably near the catalogue, where most readers with queries come to. Should like to see this in practice everywhere. Such a service is being appreciated in one library, at least, that I know of, though it is not there given in quite so full-blooded a manner.

22nd May.—Read with much elation in this month's ASSISTANT, Mr. Smith's Presidential Address. Much the best professional matter I have heard or seen ever, I think. All those in high places should commit it to memory almost. And those who aspire thereto should assimilate it well into their system now. Would just like to underline one thing he says: "The librarian who doesn't read is a frost." Which endorses my contention above, for surely the librarian must begin to read while he is a junior. And the junior and the Chief have both the same function ultimately to perform, each in his own way.

30th May.—Twice this day have sent back small messengers to borrowers, reminding them of the rule to come themselves or send *responsible* messengers. These two cases personally known to me as occurring time after time, which I have lately been watching. Noticed, too, how, in some mysterious manner, the practice quickly grows, as though the word is secretly passed about among the populace when we grow too lenient in the matter. So have come to the conclusion that regular cases, where we never or seldom see the borrower in question, and who always sends a small child with a request, must be checked, however reluctantly, and sometimes even with risk of losing the borrower. Or this thing would become a nightmare almost. For these messengers always seem to appear when we have no time to pick out the most suitable books, and thus the last stage is often worse than the first.

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CORRESPONDENCE

ESSEX COUNTY LIBRARY,
CHELMSFORD, ESSEX.

1st June, 1936.

THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

SIR,—

Miss Carnell questions my statement that towns with more than 20,000 population should maintain an independent library service. A glance at the history of librarianship will show that towns of 20,000 to 30,000 population were usually the most willing to adopt the Libraries Acts, and that many famous library services have resulted from such small beginnings. What has been done in the past with a 1d. rate can surely be accomplished now when rate limitation no longer worries us.

The Statistical Report, 1934-35, of the County Libraries Section clearly shows that out of 341 urban areas within English County Library systems, only 39 have populations of over 20,000. At the same time 171 urban areas out of a total of 302, with populations up to 19,000, are still served by centres. I suggest that county libraries leave the 39 areas with populations over 20,000 to establish library systems of their own, and to get down to the problem of establishing full-time branches in those 171 areas which are still served by centres only. Perhaps Miss Carnell will agree that this is one of the "several objects" which she has in mind.

Yours faithfully,

R. L. W. COLLISON.

EDINBURGH PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

2nd June, 1936.

THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

DEAR SIR,—

QUESTIONS FOR MR. MUNFORD

I didn't want Mr. Munford to justify his policy of supplying 50 per cent. of gingerbread, for I have read many such justifications, all much the same. But he adopted his policy not because, or not only because, he thought it was right, but because it ensured the continuance of the library and (to quote his own words) "provided for his own future." He excuses himself by referring to his

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habit of cloaking sincere opinion with flippancy. I don't mind his flippancy. I dislike his "sincere opinion," the cynical and fatal admission that a municipal library cannot survive unless the public are lured to it by 50 per cent. of free gingerbread.

While Mr. Munford's evasion of my criticism does not surprise me, his neglect to answer my questions does. I repeat them. *Will people not subscribe to public libraries?—if not, why not? If they can subscribe and will not, should public libraries be free, and why?* Seven and a half million people pay fees for wireless of ten shillings a year for each household, and buy sets and maintain batteries; why will they not pay household fees for public library service? Spread over the household, a wireless fee, according to Mr. Munford, is "almost negligible"; why is a similar library fee not "almost negligible"? Mr. Munford tries to explain away their willingness to pay licence fees by stating flatly (on what authority heaven only knows!) that "it has always been one of our national characteristics to take much more kindly to listening than to reading." He cannot slip out of his hole that way, for ratepayers are also saying: "People are ready enough to pay for novels at shop libraries; why not for books, especially novels, at public libraries?" They can and do pay for reading as for listening.

Every librarian ought to be ready with categorical answers to my questions. Mr. Munford ought to be ready. Were he asked to answer them at an estimate committee, he would not be allowed to burke them, as he does in his letter; and he wouldn't receive much sympathy if he spoke about "providing for his own future." It is good practice for him to face them squarely and to answer them.

Yours faithfully,
ERNEST A. SAVAGE.

PUBLIC LIBRARY,
BIGGIN STREET,
DOVER.
12th June, 1936.

THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.
DEAR SIR,—

ANSWERS FOR MR. SAVAGE

I do not seek to justify a policy of supplying 50 per cent. of gingerbread but of 50 per cent. fiction. I must point out that my 50 per cent. includes ginger, bread, and gingerbread, the first and third being desirable, and the second

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essential items in a balanced diet. I include such authors as Charteris, Deeping, Oppenheim, etc., as gingerbread, Joyce, Powys, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, etc., as ginger, and Fielding, Dickens, Wells, Bennett, etc., as bread. A child—and a very large proportion of public library readers are children in literary matters—will, at first, resist strongly the attempt to foist bread upon him as his staple diet, but he will gladly eat gingerbread until he tires of it and is gradually led back to the diet his friends wish him to have.

I have no doubt that many people would cheerfully subscribe to public libraries. If this new method of financial support were adopted, an overwhelming proportion of these would insist upon having gingerbread. Those readers who wanted Williamson's *British expansion*, Thorndike's *Medieval Europe*, Granville-Barker's *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, Bowley's *Elements of statistics*, Soddy's *Interpretation of the atom*, to quote a few titles stocked here which have found an appreciative but tiny public, would be crowded out. If we decided to rate for bread and to levy a poll-tax on gingerbread, this would mean that the whole community would be paying for the needs of a small minority. I should not regard this as injustice, but as bad policy. The Englishman would pay but—would he smite his chest and pride himself that his library rate was supplying the needs of an intellectual minority? He would not! He would pay and grumble! It has never been an English characteristic to raise the hat to culture, but rather the eyebrow. I prefer a policy which endeavours to provide something for everybody, both as good policy and as offering scope for betterment. If Mr. Savage chooses to describe as cynical and fatal my proposal and policy to lure the public into libraries by 50 per cent. gingerbread plus ginger plus bread, then I have the highest respect for his experienced judgment, but I remain cynic and fatalist.

Is it a bad thing to provide for our own future, *i.e.* the future of public libraries and librarianship? I can find no record in my original article of attempting to justify my policy on account of the necessity for providing for my own future. I might, in my lighter moments, regard this as individually and socially essential, but even my cynical impertinence could scarcely rise to this height.

Mr. Savage has expressed certain views on taxable capacity, rate versus price, etc., in his letters. They are views which are held by a section of public opinion and have been ably expounded by Sir Ernest Benn in his recent book on *Modern government*. I do not agree with them, and should welcome a discussion on public finance at any time, but, in view of the prolixity of this discussion on

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strictly library matters and for other reasons, I doubt if THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT is the best medium. My contention that "it has always been one of our national characteristics to take much more kindly to listening than to reading" is my own, based on a fairly extensive study of the development of public opinion and associated topics. Lord Elton, in his current broadcast talks, would appear to have come to the same conclusion.

I am sorry that I still cannot give categorical answers to the questions of my critic, but they resemble too closely the well-known query, "Have you given up beating your wife?" Hence these essays.

Yours faithfully,
W. A. MUNFORD.

OUR LIBRARY

Graded list of books for children. Compiled by a Joint Committee of the American Library Association, The National Education Association, and The National Council of Teachers of English. Nora Beust, Chairman. A.L.A. Chicago.

THIS compilation of children's books is designed for use by librarians, teachers, and parents. It is divided into three sections, each containing three grades corresponding to the American elementary school grades, beginning with books for very young children in the first section and finishing with those for older children in the third. Where books are suitable for more than one grade the fact is indicated. Few abridgments and adaptations of the classics encumber the first two sections—instead the complete version is relegated to the third, which also embraces such books as Sabatini's *Scaramouche* and Van Loon's *The Story of mankind*. C. M. Yonge is also, perhaps surprisingly, represented. There is a full subject, author, and title index.

The statement in the preface, that "Not all the good books are here, but those that are here are good," is justified judging by the English books alone, for many of the titles are strange to English eyes. Every book is given an annotation, sometimes unnecessarily. In a selective list there is no need to state that a book is well told. Again, for the sake of an annotation the "Katy" books are described as "a series of wholesome books for girls." These, however, with perhaps a general tendency to eulogize too much, are the only faults. Most of the annotations are clearly worded and supply the requisite information.

Useful supplements consist of short lists of foreign children's books,

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reference books, books for the use of the librarian, and a directory of publishers.

The general impression gained from this publication is good. It is neatly and clearly printed. Its compilation is a perfect example of co-operation, and should be recommended to the notice of English librarians if only for this reason.

F. M.

THE DIVISIONS

EASTERN DIVISION

A MEETING of the Division was held at the Ipswich Public Library on Thursday, 30th April, with Mr. B. H. Smith, F.L.A. (Norwich) in the Chair.

After the routine business had been dealt with the Chairman read a paper entitled "Notes on the way," which was in effect a critical review of modern trends of library policy and practice and contained a good deal of controversial matter. A brisk discussion followed in which many and widely varying points of view were expressed, most of the members present taking part.

The proceedings at the evening session took the form of a "hat" debate. The question under discussion concerned the principles to be followed in selecting the staff—whether beauty, brains, or brawn should be the dominating factor. In the end, in spite of a solid male vote in favour of beauty, a narrow majority was obtained for brains—a triumph for intellect over emotion.

The usual votes of thanks brought to an end an interesting and enjoyable meeting.

MIDLAND DIVISION

The Birmingham and District and Wales and Monmouthshire Branches of the Library Association and the Midland Division of the A.A.L. held a joint meeting at Hereford on Wednesday, 15th April. A busy afternoon was spent in visiting the Old House, the Cathedral and Chained Library, and the Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery, after which tea was taken at the Booth Hall by kind invitation of the Mayor (Councillor P. Gwynne James) and the Chairman of the Public Library Committee (Councillor Mrs. Luard, M.B.E., J.P.). Subsequently, at the meeting at the Town Hall, the Mayor and Mrs. Luard extended a very hearty welcome to the visitors.

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Mr. Harry Farr, City Librarian of Cardiff, in a paper on "The Organization of a hospital library service," gave a full and interesting account of the scope and working of the scheme which has been in operation in Cardiff since August, 1935. The Public Libraries Committee supply the books and the staff supervise the service, which is operated by voluntary helpers. The hospital authorities provide necessary equipment, such as book trolleys. Issues since the scheme was started have totalled 10,027. Interesting reports by a member of the Cardiff staff and a voluntary helper were included in the paper.

In his paper, "Ideals old and new," Mr. H. Grindle, Inspector of Lending Libraries, Birmingham, sketched the life and work of Edward Edwards, the first real pioneer of free public libraries, and criticized some of those who followed him in the field of librarianship. Dealing with modern tendencies, Mr. Grindle asked whether these were in the true path of development, and proceeded to reduce to absurdity certain methods of display. These had been adopted because of the craze for issues and more issues. The most widely read organs of the Press had expanded their circulations by continually reducing the standard of intelligence or of taste required for their reading. Better a mere 200 million issues from libraries that were good than 1,000 million that were beguiled. Mr. Grindle concluded his paper by summarizing a recent proposal for the introduction of a non-professional element into library staffs. Dealing with the implied claim for preferential treatment by the matriculated diploma-ed assistant, he passed to the threatened infiltration of ex-public school University graduates who had qualified at the London School of Librarianship. They were prepared to work for nothing if only they could get a footing. Their competition was likely to prove deadly.

Some discussion of both papers followed, and warm thanks were extended to the speakers, to the Mayor and Mrs. Luard, and to the Public Library Committee, and the Librarian and Curator, Mr. F. C. Morgan, for all that they had done to make possible a very successful meeting.

KENT LIBRARY GUILD

A meeting was held at Bromley on Wednesday, 6th May. After inspecting the Central Library, the visitors were conducted round the town's justly-famed public gardens. Tea, kindly provided by the Borough Librarian and his staff, was served in the Lecture Hall at the Library.

At 5.30 the meeting proper commenced. Mr. A. H. Watkins, Deputy Librarian at Bromley, read a paper on "The Function of the lending library."

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Mr. Watkins's paper dealt at some length with the deplorable standardization (at a regrettably low intellectual level) which is rapidly finding its way into every sphere of recreational activity, and set forth the plea that book selection policy should be planned in such a way as to counteract the effects of such standardizing factors as modern advertising, the cinema, compulsory education, and the like. An extremely vigorous discussion followed, during which the age-old conflict between the "popular" and the "good" received yet another airing; as usually happens when this subject is being discussed, the clock had the last word.

It was decided to cancel the July meeting in view of the holiday period. The next meeting will be held early in September; the exact date and place of meeting will be announced later.

J. D.

NEW MEMBERS

CENTRAL.—Alex. Allardyce (Lanark County, Hamilton); J. B. Ellingham (Hertford County); Richard M. Tylor (Ford Brow, Townstal, Dartmouth); Miss E. J. Willson (Marylebone).

Midland.—Miss J. Ashford (Wellingborough); B. M. Bland (Birmingham University); Miss J. L. Bunce (Leamington Spa); Miss M. M. Hewitt (Stoke-on-Trent); Miss E. I. Hill (Malvern); P. G. Holloway, E. T. Jones (Shropshire County, Shrewsbury); Miss G. J. W. White, Miss E. D. Whiteley (Derby).

North-Eastern.—Miss J. Corps (Newcastle Lit. and Phil.).

North-Western.—Arthur T. Pugh (Cheshire County, Chester); Miss J. Adams, (Liverpool); Miss W. A. Price (Wallasey); Miss C. Rutter (Warrington); Miss D. B. Saunders (Bebington); Miss N. L. Shackleton (Hoylake); J. Taylor (Ellesmere Port); A. G. Wood (St. Helens).

RESIGNATIONS.—K. M. Kemshead (Hendon); Miss M. Meachem, J. S. Mollier (Birmingham).

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